



Truancy Initiative Strategies Video Transcript

Length: 14 minutes, 1 second

Narrator: It is important to identify promising strategies that intervene with chronic truants in order to address the root causes of truancy and stop the youth's progression into more serious behavior. While the strategies featured today employ a variety of methods, they all seek to address the underlying reasons behind absences from school.

In Seattle Washington, The King County Superior Court truancy reduction project consists of a multi-tiered approach to families involved in the truancy petition process of the Juvenile Court.

[Interview with Judge Patricia Clark, King County Superior Court]

Truancy is the earliest level of the court's intervention. And it starts with the school indicating that a child has missed X number of days. The school district was mandated to file a truancy petition.

[Interview with kids that have been through the process]

[Interview with Linda]

I was out hanging out with my friends in the streets, and the cops came by and checked everyone's ID and I happened to give them mine to them and I was called to the police car and they arrested me because they said I had truancy or something on me. I don't know what it was but I know that it was embarrassing. It was embarrassing to get locked up.

[Interview with Tiffani]

I would skip school and just not come home. The first reason they brought me here [detention center] was for running away. I've had warrants out for my arrest because I was not following house rules.

[Interview with Judge Clark]

The only thing that is required then is that the court allow that child to purge, they can make it better, by doing certain things. So the courts have become very creative in using that purging mechanism

[Interview with Linda]

Learning is everything because you do kind of do feel stupid after a little while because you don't know anything. And all know how to do is talk your little smack and you know and think you know it all, and you don't know anything, you don't know anything.

Narrator: King County Superior Court contracts for truancy intervention services with community agencies in an effort to improve community and school response to truancy and to ensure that student and family needs are addressed.

In Houston, the Mayor's Office initiated a project in 1999 to target truant students in the Gulfton community, a densely populated area of the city in which a large immigrant population lives.

[Interview with Adrian Garcia, Director, Mayor's Anti-Gang Office, Houston, Texas]

The City of Houston decided to look at a different way of dealing with Truancy here in this particular community because we just found that the traditional way was basically like chasing rabbits all over the

place. And it wasn't necessary a cost-effective way of doing business, especially with an issue as troublesome as truancy. So we began to explore new ideas and then consequently because the weed and seed site offered an opportunity to identify contributing risk factors to this particular community, and truancy came up to be one of the issues that needed to be addressed here.

[video clip of Officer/Case Manager discussion regarding girl who had a lot of absences]

Narrator: A school-based case manager identifies students with chronic truancy patterns and compiles individual case files. The case is then assigned to a community police officer who works in and is familiar with the families in youth that live in the Gulfton community.

[video clip of a visit]

Narrator: Together the case manager and police officer review the files and the officer makes an unannounced visit to the home to make the student and parents aware of the legal consequence of continued absences. During the visit the officer speaks with the youth and the parent and evaluates the home environment to determine risk factors. The officer also seeks to identify the factors that are keeping the youth from attending school.

[Interview with Randy Bond, Houston Police]

Once we have determined and checked the physical aspects of the residence then we determine if there are any other problems in the house: the student possibly being pregnant, maybe a drug abuse, maybe even psychological, we'll take notes of all that and then refer them to proper agencies for assistance.

[video clip of visit]

Narrator: If it is determined that follow-up services are needed, the case manager works closely with the family and student to ensure that appropriate services are provided,

[Interview with Cenaiyda Carranza, Case Manager, TRDP]

The two schools that we work with are fairly large, high immigrant population, a lot of the families are unaware of the services that are available to them at the school setting. We try to really focus on that. To connect them with the resources in the community.

[Interview with Adrian Garcia, Director, Mayor's Anti-Gang Office, Houston, Texas]

The partners in our Truancy Reduction Demonstration Project include not only the Houston Independent School District and the Houston Police Department. But it also entails the many different service agencies in this particular community and also outside this community as well, that may be able to leverage resources to individuals living within this area.

[Interview with Randy Bond, Houston Police]

This is probably one of the better programs or the best programs as far as I am concerned, that I have ever worked with. Because there is that feeling of accomplishment. There again parents and the student understand the seriousness of the situation. We talked with them about the future, we talk to them about why they should be in school.

Narrator: In 1999, Chief Judge Jeremiah appointed a team to explore an alternative way to deal with the problem of truancy in Rhode Island.

[Interview with Jeremiah Jeremiah, Jr., Chief Judge, Rhode Island Family Court]

We started looking at the problem of truancy then and we looked at the petitions that were filed in I think in the year 1998. We had approximately 9,000 juvenile petitions filed. That is not 9,000 children, that is about 5,200 or 5,300 children. We saw that about 94% of those children were truant the year that they

committed the offense. And its KIDSCOUNT, which is an agency that gives us a lot of the statistics. Went to the training school and they figure 42 of the hot core kids, the kids that commit the real serious crimes, and they found that they all of those students had been truant the year before they committed crime. So we thought there was a correlation between truancy and committing the offense, so we thought we would look at it.

Narrator: After a truancy petition has been filed, hearings are held in schools, rather than courtrooms, and are scheduled within two weeks of the filing. After the initial hearing, the magistrate, school officials, and representatives of community agencies continue to meet with students and parents every week to monitor the student's behavior, academic performance and attendance.

[Interview with Patricia K. Asquith, Magistrate, Providence, Rhode Island]

The first thing I explained to them is that I am not here to punish you, I am here to help you. However, if there are certain actions that you have or certain behaviors there are consequences and you need to know that you are responsible for everything you do. When you do something good, good things will happen. When you do something that is not so good, well there are responsibilities and there are consequences to that. I always tell the children--I don't know you and you don't know me. We're going to get to know each other very well over time and as time goes on they understand that we are here to help them.

[Interview with Jeremiah Jeremiah, Jr., Chief Judge, Rhode Island Family Court]

In the first year, attendance increased from 49 to 89 percent. In the first year, we handled about 150 children. In the second year we handled over 600 children and attendance increased 81 percent. What we are really proud of is that the grade point average increased 67 percent. And kids just seeing the truancy court sign in the school overall there is a response to that, "I don't want to go to truancy court I better show up." They know there is something there.

[video clip of Eugene Heath meeting with a student]

Narrator: In 1998, the City of Jacksonville Juvenile Justice Comprehensive Strategy report recommended a comprehensive truancy program and a truancy center by established to minimize risk factors that lead to juvenile delinquency.

Realizing that no individual government agency or community organization could do it all, a collaborative partnership was created. Since then, strategies for keeping kids in schools in Jacksonville have targeted not only students but parents and the community.

[Interview with Michael Rutledge, Assistant Chief, Jacksonville Sheriff's Office]

In our operational orders we are required to pick up any child between the hours of 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. We base it on the school schedules. And if they are out during this time we challenge them. And make a determination one if they are out of school legitimately and we verify it with some kind of written note from the school, the, parent or some other source.

[Interview and clip of Eugene Heath, Program Administrator]

Monday through Friday JSO officers have a standing order that if they observe a child on the street during school hours, they'll stop question and detain that child and take them to the nearest middle school, high school or truancy center.

[video clip of Eugene Heath meeting with a student]

Narrator: In 1994, Jacksonville began a Truancy Arbitration Program (TAP) geared toward getting children back in school without punitive measures.

TAP targets students who are between the ages six and fifteen. If a child misses too much school, they are asked to attend a hearing with their parents and school officials in the State's Attorney's Office, whose staff volunteers to arbitrate the meeting.

[video clip from arbitration hearing]

Narrator: As part of the program, School Personnel conduct home visits and work with families and youth to develop individualized attendance plans. Case Managers work with the schools to track attendance after the plan is in place.

[Interview with Harry Shorstein, State Attorney, Duvall County, FL]

We entered into an agreement, an actual contract with the student and parent explaining to the student the student's requirement to be in school and explaining very importantly to the parent that its not only a moral obligation but a legal obligation to see that the student goes to school. And when necessary we arrest parents who fail to obey the contract.

Narrator: Over 90% of the students who attend TAP hearings return to school within four days of their hearing.

Narrator: In Suffolk County, New York, probation officers have been placed in several schools to monitor attendance and address the underlying causes of chronic truancy.

[Interview with Denise Childs Lewis, Vice Principal, Bellport M.S.]

I think on a whole, I know on a whole that our attendance rate has gotten better with the communications with the parents, with the students, with role-modeling, with constant instruction and guidance. I know that at Bellport Middle School we have had a better attendance record because of Officer Caldwell.

[video clip of homeroom for truant students]

Narrator: Truant students are assigned to a separate homeroom for a two-week period that is staffed by a probation officer and she uses the time to discuss the consequences of truancy. And provide additional support for students as they work on improving their attendance. The officer works at both the middle and elementary school level and also conducts home visits of students and families as needed.

Interview with Anita Caldwell, Probation Officer, Bellport Middle School

We, the school and myself, have decided that we will give each child 5 days of truancy. After 5 days we will want to know what is going on with that child. So at that point I get the child's schedule, I go find the child, interview the child to find out why the child was not in school

[Interview with Student]

I'd end up sleeping in a lot, sleeping late, and then I'd be in a rush to get to school and I'd end up being a couple minutes late. I got pulled out of math class and she brought me to her office and I got a note saying that I would have to go there for two weeks.

Narrator: The officer also focuses on activities that reduce the number of cases that are referred to family court by providing services at the school and making sure families and students are referred to appropriate community services.

[END]

